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ABSTRACT

Communication apprehension (CA) affects from 15% to 20% of the college population, indicating inherent problems of negative cognitive appraisal, conditioned anxiety, or skills deficits. Use of an individualized approach to the alleviation of CA has been shown to increase students' class interaction and to improve their verbal skills. During an initial meeting students are encouraged to offer information about themselves, administered assessment inventories such as the "Expressed Acceptance of Self Scale," and then given an assignment using positive imagery. During the students' second sessions, they are given a folder containing their self-acceptance score, personal report of communication apprehension score, an overall analysis of the scores, and a needs assessment. They are then assigned to one of three tracks: (1) the reasonable thinking track helps those with low self-acceptance, (2) systematic desensitization helps those with conditioned anxiety, and (3) goal setting helps those with skills deficits. The apparent success of this approach suggests that since students develop CA in various ways, individualized methods should be used to assess and remedy different types of CA. Endnotes contain 38 items. (SRT)

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Alleviation of Communication Apprehension:

An Individualized Approach

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ABSTRACT

Communication apprehension, the fear of participating in oral communication, is a problem faced by every speech educator in every speech classroom. This phenomenon is found to affect significant numbers of elementary and secondary students, and 15 to 20% of the college population. Two prevalent definitions, communication apprehension and reticence, indicate inherent problems of negative cognitive appraisal, conditioned anxiety, or skills deficit. This report overviews a method to assess individual amounts and types of communication apprehension and describes corresponding alleviation procedures of reasonable thinking, systematic desensitization, and goal setting.

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Alleviation of Communication Apprehension:

An Individualized Approach

Speech communication educators are continually concerned about communicaton apprehension (CA) experienced by students in speech classrooms. CA, the fear or anxiety associated with oral communication, affects significant numbers of elementary and secondary students and 15 to 20% of the college population.[1] Speech inhibition affects achievement and learning styles of students through lowered test scores and performance in certain types of instruction.[2] Two prevalent definitions of CA are advanced by speech educators and subsequent methods of alleviation pertinent to each definition have been developed. This report overviews a method to assess the amount and type of CA experienced by an individual and describes corresponding alleviation procedures needed.

The amount of CA experienced by students has been revealed in several significant studies. Garrison and Garrison found CA to exist in significant amounts from the first to the twelfth grade.[3] In probing the school environment as a potential cause of increased CA, McCroskey found children in lower elementary grades (K-3) experienced less CA than upper elementary grade (4-6) children. He concluded that a substantial increase in CA occurred during grades three and four.[4] This finding was substantiated by Shaw in grades 4-6[5] and Wheeless in grades 3-6.[6]

Moreover, CA was found to exist in detrimental amounts in junior high school[7] and 54% of junior high school students reported various amounts of shyness.[8] In the college environment, studies show 15 to 20% of students are affected by CA.[9]

Need for Communication Apprehension Remediation

The findings of significant amounts of CA among student populations leads to the recognition of specific areas of academic deficiency, distinct learning patterns, and speculation as to the causes for other-than-normal academic behavior. Students who are highly apprehensive score significantly lower than less apprehensive students on the American College test (ACT)[10] and on secondary school achievement tests.[11] Grade point average (GPA) appears to be affected by CA as well. High apprehensive college students showed one half grade point lower GPA's across all courses taken at a four year college than did students with low apprehension.[12]

Learning patterns are also negatively affected by high amounts of CA. Numbers of students in classes as well as types of instruction have a bearing on the amount of learning by the highly apprehensive student. In college classes of 20 to 30 students, high apprehensives received lower scores on both objective tests and instructor-evaluated written projects than students with low communication apprehension.[13]

In a personalized instruction learning setting, higher apprehensive subjects were compared to low apprehensives in achievement. It was found that high apprehensive students completed fewer of the modules and took more tests on individualized modules.[14] From these studies it appears that highly apprehensive students do not interact positively in small class situations which provide access to peer interaction and teacher availability. When achievement of 709 students was examined in a typical mass lecture course, no relationship between CA and achievement was found.[15] This study supports the preference of the highly apprehensive student for less interactive classroom situations.

Possible causes of the difficulty in academic achievement and learning styles of CA students can be attributed to several factors. First, most researchers reject the notion of correlation between intelligence and CA. This premise is based on evidence where intelligence and CA have not been found to be correlated, differing learning styles which negate consistent patterns of intelligence scoring, and the high correlation between CA and test anxiety.[16]

Intelligence may not be reflected in the achievement of the CA student, but students manifesting high CA have been found to develop negative attitudes toward junior high, high school, and college.[17] While investigating student attitudes and CA in the middle school, Hurt, Preiss, and Davis found CA to be significantly correlated with affective learning or attitudes toward school, and cognitive learning or grades.[18] More specifically, they found as the level of CA increased, student attitudes toward school became more negative and grades lower.

Another possible cause of difficulty with academic achievement may be the result of teacher expectations. McCroskey found evidence to suggest that teachers showed more positive expectations for the low apprehensive student and negative expectations for the high apprehensive student.[19] This finding was substantiated by Garrison and Garrison.[20] It is difficult to determine if student behavior (CA) or teacher attitude comes first, but the result may be similar to the Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy, that is the attempt of the student to respond as the teacher expects.

Communication Apprehension Approaches

The major definitions of this phenomenon are presented as communication apprehension or reticence. CA is defined by McCroskey as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication

with another person or persons."[21] This definition suggests that experiencing fear or anxiety with communication encounters will cause the person to use other-than-normal communication patterns and to engage in less communication. Second, Phillips' original definition of the reticent person was one "for whom anxiety about participation in oral communication outweighs his (or her) projection of gain from the situation."[22] Later theoretical statements by Phillips have described causitive agents (e.g., lack of skills development) which delete anxiety as a part of this definition.[23]

The two major schools of thought concerning treatment of CA correspond with the definitions of communication apprehension and reticence. The first, the communication-anxiety behavior therapy school, advanced by McCroskey and colleagues, regards anxiety to be a major, if not the primary, cause of CA. Major alleviation methods of this school include cognitive modification[24] and systematic desensitization.[25]

Cognitive modification, an umbrella term for a number of procedures emphasizing the important effects of thoughts or cognitions on behaviors and feelings, is based on Ellis' initial work on rational emotive therapy.[26] This procedure helps subjects to analyze and challenge negative thoughts and to evaluate the impact of these thoughts on their feelings and behavior in communication situations.

A second treatment method used to reduce speech anxiety is systematic desensitization. Based on the principle of reciprocal inhibition, fear is reduced by pairing aversive stimuli with relaxation.[27] An anxiety hierarchy is developed by arranging feared situations from least to most distressing. Subjects are taught basic relaxation techniques; relaxation acts as an inhibitor for anxiety that might be evoked by the imagined scenes from the hierarchy.

The second school of thought, the reticent or rhetoritherapy school, advances the notion that anxiety is not the basis of dysfunctional communication, and treatment is directed toward the modification of particular target behaviors. Rhetoritherapy, or skills development, includes a description of the student's behavior, how others respond to him or her, the setting of communication goals, and development of related speech skills training.[28]

After reviewing present methods of treatment research, those to alleviate negative cognitive appraisal, conditioned anxiety, and skills deficit, Glazer makes the following recommendations: (1) amounts of CA should be carefully measured; (2) multiple assessment is needed; (3) instructors need to provide treatment procedures most effective with particular individuals: (4) follow-up assessment is necessary.[29]

In keeping with Glazer's recommendations, speech educators cannot assume speech apprehension is experienced by each individual in the same way, rather we should determine the type of apprehension problem the student experiences and provide methods and material to alleviate that particular problem. It is absurd to think an entire class of students suffers only from negative cognitive appraisal or conditioned anxiety and treat them all with the same alleviation method. As Kelly has said, "Present methods do not provide a precise account of the specific nature of individual difficulties. The particular treatment used should depend on the exact nature of the problem as it is reported by the individual, rather than applying one specific mode of treatment in every case."[30] The approach described here to overcoming speech anxiety includes analyzing the individual apprehension problem, using the assessment data to determine appropriate methods of alleviation, planning the alleviation activity track, and session-by-session accomplishment of the activities.

Individualized Alleviation of Communication Apprehension

The following material is an approach to indivualizing alleviation of communication apprehension. The ideas were originally developed for a one-semester speech communication course in which communication apprehensive students could fulfill requirements for the basic speech course.[31] These ideas were later refined for use with CA individuals and groups in the setting of a university speech center. The center was provided by the speech communication department and offered services to university students, faculty, and staff.[32]

The results of using an individualized approach for the alleviation of CA have been quite positive. Post-test scores of the PRCA-24 and CA inventories have shown an average of 25% improvement in the lowering of apprehension scores. Students have reported enthusiasm for their ability to communicate more effectively with their peers and in class projects. Teachers of these students have commented on increased interaction in class and improved verbal skills.[33]

This approach to assessment and alleviation of individual CA may be used with individuals or groups with similar needs according to different situations:

(1) the individual: Students may be self-selected; the request for help may stem from a speech to deliver in speech class, a report to give in another class, a long-felt need, an oral test, a speech to the public. Referral may be made by another teacher.

(2) the group: Students may form a group with the same appraised alleviation needs or have the same academic need, such as a class report. The teacher sees the same need in several students.

Therefore, according to need, such situations may be handled one-to-one or on a group basis.

Initial Meeting and Assessment

1. Introductory questions: Example, "How can I help you?" This encourages the student to describe the individual problem. The instructor may ask "what, when, where" to elicit information.

2. Discussion of CA: To put the student at ease, a general description of the pervasiveness of CA among student population, types of CA (cognitive, conditioned, skills deficit) is offered. An overview of help which the instructor can provide is described.

3. Student information: The student is asked to provide name, address, and items concerning experiences with communication. See Appendix for Information Form.

4. Assessment inventories: (1) Expressed Acceptance of Self Scale[34] The score will indicate how much the student's CA results from reasonable or unreasonable concerns about self-evaluation and evaluation by others. (2) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24[35] The score will indicate amounts of CA toward social conversation, meetings, group discussion, and public speaking. (3) About Myself and Oral Communication This paper is assigned during the initial meeting, then it is read and discussed with the student during the second meeting. The paper could reveal the student's personal concern, background, and the particular people and events which contribute to the CA.

5. Assignment in Positive Imagery: This technique can enable a person to approach a fearful communication event in a calm and controlled way. By thinking of an occasion positively, the person actually programs or forecasts the manner of his or her thoughts and actions. It may take some time for one to imagine a scene, and imagine one's behavior and feelings in that situation, and then to act in that manner, but many people have found positive imagery to

be helpful. The procedure is explained: "Think of a dreaded communication event such as a speech, a class report, an interview, an upcoming party. Beforehand, find a few minutes when you can be quiet and alone. Imagine yourself and the other people who will be in the scene. Now think through the scene in every detail, imagining everything exactly the way you want it to be. How do you want to enter the scene? What will you say first? How do you look, act? How do you want other people to respond? Try to imagine the scene several times before the event."

6. Folder: This folder for each individual will include all the described items and records of activities accomplished and progress made.

Analysis

The instructor reports the following information to the student during the second session:

1. Self-Acceptance score (range of high, average, low)
2. PRCA-24 (range of overall and subscores)
3. Overall analysis (summary of above)
4. Needs assessment: Example:

Difficulty	Indication	Track
low self-acceptance	cognitive appraisal	I. Reasonable Thinking
high CA	conditioned anxiety	II. Systematic Desensitization
neither of above	skills deficit	III.Goal Setting

Any one or a combination of the needs above is possible. If a combination is indicated some blending of the tracks can be accomplished. For example, if the need is a combination of cognitive appraisal and conditioned anxiety, during one session activities in Track I, Reasonable Thinking, can be discussed and assigned, then the student can hear one Systematic Desensitization tape from Track II.

Tracks. Introductory Activities

1. "For me, communication apprehension is . . . " Students are asked to list five phrases related to their experience of CA under: Emotionally (how I feel), Behaviorally (how I act), and Situationally (where I am). This information helps determine what changes can be made to overcome the individual's CA.

2. "What do I want to do about CA? I want to change the phrases from 'For me CA is . . .' to read:" The student rewords the phrases of Emotional, Behavioral, Situational from negative to positive. This shows the student that the negative effects of CA can be changed and also creates objective goals on which to proceed.

3. Positive Self Statements: The instructor discusses the effect on behavior of positive and negative thoughts about self. The student is asked to think of five statements he/she would use to describe feelings or behaviors about self and communication and then to reword the statement from negative to positive. Example: Negative: When I am rejected by a friend, I feel that I am an inadequate person. Positive: When I am rejected by a friend, I am disappointed, but I still accept myself and the other person.

Track I. Reasonable Thinking

1. Are feelings positive or negative? The instructor uses magazine pictures showing people displaying emotions, (e.g., love, frustration, fear, satisfaction) and discusses whether the emotion is positive or negative. The point is that how the feeling is perceived determines whether it is positive or negative.

2. Are your feelings about CA reasonable or unreasonable? The instructor discusses reasonable and unreasonable beliefs and how they result in feelings and behaviors toward an event. Example: If the person says about an upcoming

party, "I'll act awful. No one will like me," probably that is the way he/she will act.

3. What is reasonable thinking? Discussion of the process of choosing feelings and testing for unreasonable thinking. 1. A reasonable belief is true. 2. A reasonable belief is not absolutistic. 3. A reasonable belief results in moderate emotion. 4. A reasonable belief helps attain goals.

4. Recognition of reasonable and unreasonable statements. The student distinguishes between a list of reasonable and unreasonable statements. The instructor can explain the unreasonable answers. The unreasonable statements can direct the student to needed changes in attitude.

5. Could feelings about CA be unreasonable? Discussion of four categories of unreasonable beliefs: (1) statements of human worth, either of oneself or others, (2) need statements which are chosen requirements for happiness or survival, (3) awfulizing statements which exaggerate the negative consequences of a situation, (4) words which reflect unrealistic demands on events and individuals.

6. Model of Reasonable Thinking: Discussion and application of Ellis' A-B-C model of reasonable thinking. Example, A, Activating event: "I gave a speech and forgot part of it,"; B, belief: "What a dummy I am,"; C, consequences: embarrassment, self-doubt; D, disputing; use the four tests of unreasonable thinking; E, effect: new philosophy, thoughts, attitude.

7. Practice using A-B-C model of reasonable thinking. The student may return to "For me CA is . . ." or statements from reasonable/unreasonable statements for unreasonable examples.

8. Log of unreasonable beliefs: For one day the student records unreasonable beliefs. The unreasonable beliefs are tested using the A-B-C model.[36]

Track 2. Systematic Desensitization

1. Theory of systematic desensitization. With the student, the instructor discusses the theory of systematic desensitization, including conditioning, counter-conditioning and the relaxation technique, development of hierarchy, and combining the two.

2. First practice session of relaxation technique. The instructor may orally guide the students through the procedure or use recorded tapes. The student is given a printed sequence of the relaxation steps and assigned to practice the procedure twice daily.

3. Development of the hierarchy. The instructor helps the student to develop a hierarchy of steps leading to a feared communication situation. For example, a situation or area of concern may have been specified on the PRCA-24.

4. Combination of relaxation and hierarchy: The student is asked to practice the relaxation technique and begin to imagine the hierarchy scenes, one at a time, while being relaxed.

5. Log of practice. The student is asked to keep a log of practice sessions, development of hierarchy, progress being made.

6. Completion of technique. The student completes the relaxation technique until all feared scenes on the hierarchy are imagined while feeling relaxed.[37]

Track 3. Goal Setting

1. Discussion of Goal Setting. The instructor and student discuss the meaning of goal-setting, its results, and how it is applied to CA.

2. Example of abstract and objective goal setting.

Abstract Goal Setting Plan	Specific Goal Setting Plan
Step A. Define goal areas:	Step A. Define goal areas:
Be a better speaker	Be a better speaker

Step B. Formulate specific goal statements: Learn to be a better conversationalist.	Step B. Formulate specific goal statements: Learn to start, continue and end a conversation.
Step C. Criteria for success: I want the listener to like me.	Step C. Criteria for success: I want the listener to answer my questions and respond with a smile.
Step D. List steps in preparation and implementation: The next time I have a chance I will talk with an attractive girl.	Step D. List steps in preparation and implementation: Monday, Sept. 25, in English class I will talk to that blonde girl. I will go to the class early. To start, I will say a friendly "hello," and ask her how she likes the class. To end, I'll say, "Nice to meet you. If we have any class problems, let's get together."
Step E. Plan for contingencies: I'll think of some ideas.	Step E. Plan for contingencies: If the girl is not there Monday, I'll talk with her Wednesday. If she doesn't answer me, I'll plan to talk with someone else.

3. List of abstract statements. A list of abstract statements is developed from the CA problems the student has generated in previous sessions. The statements are then re-written to specify behaviors needed to accomplish the goal.

4. Development of a goal. The student is asked to develop a communication goal setting plan according to this pattern: A. State a general goal; B. Describe the specific behaviors to accomplish the goal; C. List criteria for success; D. List steps in preparation for performance of behaviors; E. List alternative plan.

5. Assignment of completed goal. The student is asked to perform the goal as it has been planned.

6. Performance appraisal. The student and instructor discuss the above goal and proceed to other communication goals.[38]

Conclusion

CA is a phenomenon that is faced by every speech educator in every classroom. This phenomenon is destructive to student learning styles and academic achievement. Speech educators need to be aware of the problem, show concern about alleviation, and be active in helping the CA student. Since students have developed CA in various ways, individualized methods should be used to remedy different types of CA. Students may manifest problems due to negative cognitive appraisal, conditioned anxiety, or skills deficit. Students should be properly assessed to determine their individual CA concerns and corresponding tracks of reasonable thinking, systematic desensitization, and goal setting used for alleviation.

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Appendix

Information Form

1. Name_____

2. Address_____ 3. Telephone_____

_____

4. Are you now taking a speech class?_____

If so, Course number_____Section_____Instructor_____

5. Why did you seek the assistance of the Speech Center?

6. Do you have problems: talking to one other person? ____yes ____no

talking in a small group of friends?____yes ____no

of businss people? ____yes ____no

in an interview? ____yes ____no

when giving a report or speech? ____yes ____no

To be filled in by the instructor:

Self-Acceptance score_____range_____

PRCA-24 overall score_____Group_____Meeting_____Conversation_____

Public Speaking_____

Analysis:

Needs:

Times met: Progress: